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"Not that I have already attained...but I press on" (Phil 3:12)

Articles, Bible Studies

The Crime of Silence (-"if he does not tell it, he bears guilt." Leviticus 5:1)

Posted by Domenic Marbaniang · December 20, 2012

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If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter; if he does not tell it, he bears guilt. (NKJV)

If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible. (NIV)

If you sin by not stepping up and offering yourself as a witness to something you've heard or seen in cases of wrongdoing, you'll be held responsible. (MSG)

A popular quote, usually attributed to Edmund Burke rightly or wrongly, says **"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."** In the same vein, Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, **"The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it."**

While the right to silence is a right that citizens have in order to guard against false self-incrimination, a witness of a crime who doesn't stand up to oppose a crime or testify against it is held as an accomplice in the crime.

A blog entry on October 29, 2009 on CNN.COM asked the question: **"Should people who witness a crime face jail for failing to report it?"** The writer, Jack Cafferty, referred to a case in which a 15 year old girl was gangraped in the presence of around 10 onlookers who did nothing to save her from the two-and-half hour assault that was going on. None of them even called 9-1-1 to report the crime. On the other hand, the Police reported that some witnesses took photos while others laughed. There were other cases in which witnesses even refused to come forward to testify. The unwillingness of witnesses to report and/or come forward and witness against the perpetrators of such crime made such cases maddeningly wicked. Cafferty reports:

California law makes it illegal not to report a crime against a child, but the cutoff is 14-years-old. Since the victim in this case is 15, cops say they can't arrest the spectators. The law needs to be changed immediately.

Meanwhile this horrific rape of a young girl follows that brutal beating death caught on video of a 16-year-old honor student in Chicago.

That case has been hampered by the refusal of witnesses to come forward. These kids in Chicago also stood by and watched this teenager murdered – beaten to death in broad daylight – and did nothing.

Experts say the reason crimes aren't reported could be a social phenomenon known as "the bystander effect" that means the larger the number of people involved in any situation, the less will get done...

One famous case happened in New York in the 1960s – where people watched or heard a serial killer rape, rob and murder a woman named Kitty Genovese. At the time, one witness said: "I didn't want to be involved."

To Cafferty's question: "Should people who witness a crime, like the gang rape of a 15-year-old California girl, face jail for failing to report it?" one former Judge, Joe, replied: **"I am a retired judge. If I had these people in my courtroom, I would charge them with aiding and abetting the crime and deal with them accordingly."**

The Bible calls inaction against crime as sin, even if it were a simple failure to witness. The earthly law courts are greatly dependent on witnesses and evidence for the administration of proper justice. Eyewitnesses play an important role in the determinations of a case. However, the Bible makes it clear "whether he has seen or known of the matter", one must report. Failure to report or testify against crime is abetting of injustice. Such a person has become judicially dysfunctional and is like an organ of the body that has lost connection with the brain.

This also applies to the Church. In 1 Corinthians 1:11, Paul writes to the Corinthian Church saying "some from **Chloe's household have informed me** that there are quarrels among you." The whole letter was an answer to reports of what was going wrong in the Church. Obviously, some would try to label Chloe's family as being gossipers, whisperers, or talebearers; but, the Bible commends their action. Because, it is not talebearing to report a wrong matter to the head (Paul was their father, 1Cor. 4:15). If he doesn't know, there won't be correction; and if there was no correction, a little leaven, a little root of bitterness, one garment spotted by flesh would defile many.

Genesis 37:2 tells us that **Joseph brought a bad report of his brothers** to his father. Obviously, he was not very much liked by his brothers for doing that. But, to someone who's interested in justice, whether someone likes them or not matters very less. This didn't mean that Joseph was too self-righteous. It meant that he was a faithful son.

The Bible condemns false testimony as sin. However, it commands testifying to the truth as a responsible act in a politically just society.

Some Proverbs in Line

Proverbs 12:17 A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.

Proverbs 14:5 A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies.

Proverbs 14:25 A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.

Proverbs 19:5 A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free.

Proverbs 19:9 A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish.

Proverbs 19:28 A corrupt witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down evil.

Proverbs 21:28 A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever.

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